

The Impact of Study Abroad on Affective Factors: Motivation, Attitudes and Anxiety

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Abstract

Interest in study abroad (SA) and its linguistic outcomes has significantly increased in recent years due to globalisation and its emphasis on intercultural communication (Arnett, 2002). Nevertheless, although affective factors play a crucial role in the successful acquisition of an L2 (Gabrys-Barker and Bielska, 2013), little attention has been paid so far to the extralinguistic effects of SA within Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The purpose of this study is to analyse the relation between SA and motivation, attitudes and anxiety for 25 Spanish university students. Affective outcomes were measured using a modified version of Gardner's (1985) Attitudes and Motivational Test Battery (AMTB) survey as well as four open ended questions. This investigation sought to examine whether SA led to an increase in L2 motivation, a decrease in L2 anxiety and a development of positive attitudes towards the target language and its community. This research also investigated whether SA resulted in an improved perception of students' linguistic skills. Findings of the study demonstrated that participants' instrumental and integrative motivation increased significantly, and that language anxiety (LA) decreased considerably, mainly in out-of-classroom contexts. Although students' attitudes towards the L2 became more positive, attitudes towards English native speakers displayed greater variation since they depend on the amount and nature of students' encounters with the target group. Therefore, some participants reported a positive change in their stance towards native speakers, others declared that their attitudes remained unchanged and, although to a lesser extent, some students developed a negative image of English native speakers. Finally, results exhibited an improvement on students' perception of their communicative competence, notably on their fluency. This study supports the view that SA, together with learner strive to become competent L2 speakers, provides an optimal context for the development of positive motivational, attitudinal and anxiety outcomes that contribute to the successful acquisition of a foreign language.

Keywords: Study abroad; Motivation; Attitudes; Language anxiety.

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Glossary

AH: At Home

AMTB: Attitudes and Motivational Test Battery

FI: Formal Instruction

L2: Second Language

LA: Language Anxiety

SA: Study Abroad

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

WTC: Willingness to Communicate

1. Introduction

Each year countries from every continent send and receive a growing number of students that take part in Study Abroad (SA) programmes. According to UNESCO, in 1975 there were approximately 0.8 million international students overseas. Less than four decades later, this figure was fivefold: in 2013 campuses worldwide welcomed 4.1 million foreign students. This data confirms the assumption that overseas experiences are becoming increasingly popular as a consequence of globalisation, which advocates for a reinforcement of social relations, disregarding geographical boundaries (Arnett, 2002). This author states that nowadays, as a result of the media, individuals develop a *bicultural identity*, one of them being “an identity rooted in the local culture” whereas the second one refers to “a global identity that gives them a sense of belonging to a world-wide culture” (p. 777). Mobility programmes aim at reinforcing said international identity by offering the possibility of integrating in the global community and thus, enhancing students’ intercultural communicative competence, which refers to learners’ ability to negotiate cultural meanings with individuals from different sociocultural backgrounds (Pérez-Vidal, 2014).

Indeed, both long- and short-term mobility programmes offer the opportunity to develop multicultural and multilingual knowledge. Kinginger (2009:11) defines SA as “a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes”, one of which is to enhance language expertise. After my own SA, I noticed that not only had my level of English improved, but also that my motivation towards learning the language had significantly increased and that a feeling of self-confidence had substituted the nervousness present in my interactions in English prior to the sojourn. Furthermore, after using the L2 with native speakers on a daily basis, I developed a more positive attitude towards the target language and its community. This experience prompted me to explore the relation between SA and motivation, attitudes and anxiety in order to investigate their role in the successful acquisition of a foreign language.

The current study opens with a review of previous research on SA and Second Language Acquisition (SLA). In section 3 I will provide a theoretical and empirical framework of the three affective factors mentioned above and their relation with SA.

The following sections will deal with the investigation about the effect of SA on 25 university English L2 speakers' motivation, attitudes and anxiety using the Attitudes and Motivational Test Battery (AMTB) questionnaire (Gardner, 1985) and four open ended questions. Results of the study will be analysed within the framework of the previous research provided in section 3. Finally, I will conclude by summarising the main points of the findings of the investigation as well as by offering some suggestions for further research on the topic.

SA has gained popularity over the past decades due to the current globalised era, which asks for an evaluation of its effects in order to provide the optimal context for the development of language competence. This study together with the review of previous research in the area offers an analysis of the role of SA and affective factors in foreign language learning.

2. SA and SLA

It is widely believed that having an overseas experience helps to improve foreign language proficiency, based on the common assumption that those who immerse themselves in the target community will be the ones that perform best in their language of specialisation (Freed, 1995). This presupposition is supported by several SLA theories: Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) states that SA offers valuable input that allows for an unconscious or implicit language learning; the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996) and the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995), on the other hand, highlight the role of SA on explicit language development through interaction, meaning negotiation and language production. Moreover, recent studies affirm that only the circumstances found in overseas immersion lead to a native-like "electrophysiological signature" (Pérez-Vidal, 2014:2).

Nevertheless, research on linguistic gains after a period abroad seems to bring into question the previously mentioned theories and beliefs, since SA has been frequently found to have little or no impact on language development. Pérez-Vidal (2014) explains that this contradiction could be attributed to different reasons, one of them being the limited sample used in studies, from which it is difficult to draw conclusions that apply to a larger number of language learners. Another possible reason is that research is often based on comparisons between At Home (AH) and SA students. This contrast, however, tends to focus on the dissimilarities between implicit and explicit instruction and does not

take individual differences into account, which can have a great influence on the acquisition of a second language.

Nonetheless, several studies have analysed language development both in the classroom and abroad, in order to establish the optimal context for L2 learning. According to Freed (1995), overseas experiences encourage students to expand their communicative repertoire by facing diverse situations that do not arise in the context of formal instruction (FI). Indeed, Pérez-Vidal (2014) found that after a period abroad, SA students surpassed AH students in terms of complexity, fluency and accuracy. Mora (2014) and Housen et al. (2011), on the other hand, detected gains in the classroom context that did not take place in the informal one, such as the discrimination ability or global competence. Therefore, it is sensible to conclude that both formal and informal instruction are beneficial for SLA, since each one provides a diverse range of situations that lead to the development of different linguistic and extralinguistic skills. The classroom context tends to enhance self-confidence and provides “a solid grammatical and lexical foundation” (Pérez-Vidal, 2014:106), whereas informal instruction seems to increase learners’ motivation, fluency and listening skills.

Contradictions in SA findings may also be a consequence of the variables that are being analysed, for research on linguistic gains after a period abroad exhibits diverse outcomes depending on the skill assessed. For instance, while Allen’s (2002) study shows a major development of SA students’ listening ability, Tanaka and Ellis’ (2003) analysis revealed minor improvements in this particular skill. Nevertheless, scholars agree that overseas experiences result in considerable positive changes on students’ fluency and oral proficiency (Dufon and Churchill, 2006). However, these are greatly influenced by learners’ interaction with the host community or their willingness to communicate (WTC), which is, in turn, affected by each students’ personality traits. Freed (1995) argued that proficiency level is likely to determine the amount of interaction with the target community; that is, more advanced learners are more prone to develop social networks with native speakers, whereas those less linguistically prepared tend to be less willing to do so. Nonetheless, a later study carried out by Yashima et al. (2004) found that interaction with the target community is influenced by learners’ perception of their communicative competence rather than their proficiency level. Informal contact with native speakers exposes learners to different situations that will enable them to develop socio-pragmatic awareness along with their overall linguistic skills (Isabelli-García,

2006). In order for this integration to take place, traits such as persistence, self-confidence and openness are essential. Therefore, it could be inferred that although SA offers the opportunity to improve foreign language proficiency, the learning context along with the amount and nature of the interaction with the host community are crucial for this improvement to materialise (Dufon and Churchill, 2006).

Analyses of linguistic gains can however result in misleading conclusions about the benefits of an overseas experience, since they do not take into account affective outcomes after SA. This matter will be tackled along the different sections of the current essay.

3. SA and Affective Factors

Affective Factors in SLA refer to individuals' emotions and attitudes towards both the foreign language and themselves as language learners. Studies have demonstrated that they play a significant role on language acquisition: high levels of Language Anxiety (LA), lack of motivation to learn the L2 or negative attitudes towards L2 speakers and their language have been found to hinder the acquisition of a foreign language (Gabrys-Barker and Bielska, 2013). Positive emotions together with low levels of LA, on the other hand, were more likely to bring about greater linguistic gains. These findings are supported by Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, according to which, only when the affective filter is dropped will the input reach learners' Language Acquisition Device. However, if students lack self-confidence or motivation, their filter will raise, resulting in the hindrance of input entrance.

The following section will provide a theoretical and empirical framework of the role of three affective factors (motivation, attitudes and anxiety) with regards to SLA and their relation with SA.

3.1. Motivation

3.1.1. Motivation in SLA

Gardner (1985) defined the term motivation in SLA as a combination of the desire to learn the language, positive attitudes towards said goal and the effort to achieve it. He emphasised that only the presence of these three characteristics together will result in a motivated individual. In isolation, they do not necessarily imply motivation, since a

student might experience the desire to learn a language but may not strive to do so, or similarly, an individual may be driven to achieve said goal due to social pressures (extrinsic motivation) and not as a result of their intrinsic motivation.

When considering individuals' *orientation* to learn a language, or in other words, the reason why they have that goal, Gardner (1985) distinguishes between two types of orientations in relation to language learning. Instrumental orientation refers to the desire to learn a language due to utilitarian or practical reasons such as enhancing future professional success. The notion of integrative orientation, on the other hand, refers to the yearning to learn a foreign language in order to interact with native speakers and become acquainted with their culture. This concept, however, has been thoroughly discussed over the past years as a result of the globalisation of the English language. As previously stated, geographical boundaries are no longer considered limits due to technological advancements such as social networks, which have had a significant linguistic impact, especially on the English language. As a result, English does no longer have a specific community of speakers, and therefore, learners may want to interact not only with native speakers, but also with a wider community that does not necessarily belong to English speaking countries (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009). The current situation asked for a reformulation of the concept of integrative orientation. Yashima (2002:57) broadens the meaning of integrativeness by using the notion of “international posture”, which refers to the interest and open-mindedness towards overseas and multicultural experiences, thus expanding the target community from a geographically definite group of speakers to an extensive and international community of English speakers.

Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, on the other hand, introduces a different term that is likely to join both integrative and instrumental orientations, generally considered opposing concepts. This term, known as the ideal L2 self, refers to the ideal image of the attributes a language learner wished to have in the future, which can function as a powerful motivator. This image could involve the L2 learner communicating fluently with other L2 speakers (integrativeness) or using the L2 for work purposes (instrumentality), or a combination of both orientations. The notion of the ideal L2 self, therefore, offers a more updated model of L2 Motivation that conforms to the current globalised era.

Nonetheless, the desire, attitudes and effort to attain a goal are context-dependent; as Dörnyei (2009:249) explains, motivation is dynamic and it undergoes changes

influenced by “ongoing processes of identification, differentiation and the L2 learning experience”. Therefore, as it will be seen in the next section, SA tends to have a big impact on motivation, whose increase or decrease reflects its non-static nature. In the next section, I will provide a review of the literature about the relation between SA and motivation in order to show the different ways in which they can mutually influence each other.

3.1.2. Motivation and SA

Several studies have focused on the motivational outcomes after an overseas experience. The one carried out by Allen and Herron (2003) did not seem to detect an increase in integrative motivation among 25 university French students after a summer SA. These results may be partly explained by the students’ feelings of self-consciousness or embarrassment when using the target language, which could have led to the avoidance of interaction with native speakers. Therefore, it could be inferred that negative emotions or thoughts may have a major influence on the effort to develop social networks within the target community. This conclusion is supported by Dufon and Churchill’s (2006) study of Spanish learners in North-American universities spending five months in Argentina. The motivational outcomes after the period abroad varied considerably among the SA students: unlike learners with low motivation, those that showed higher levels of motivation interacted more often with native speakers and consequently, obtained greater linguistic gains.

Similarly to the previous study by Allen and Herron (2003), the lack of WTC with members of the target community was due to deficits in L2 learners’ motivation. Pérez-Vidal (2014) also found a correlation between students’ initial motivation and positive expectations towards SA, and their wish to interact with the target community. Furthermore, Dufon and Churchill (2006) found a change in three of the learners’ motivational orientation (one of them from instrumental to integrative motivation and the other two from instrumental to resultative low motivation due to negative experiences with the host culture), which confirms its non-static nature. For this reason, motivation should not be analysed in isolation, since it is connected with other factors such as students’ self-image, their attitudes towards the L2 and its community, and the nature of their social networks, among others.

Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, has been found to decrease after SA

(Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Yager (1998) found an association between higher levels of integrative motivation and lower levels of instrumental motivation, and advanced L2 students' significant linguistic gains.

The investigations mentioned above suggest that SA is likely to positively impinge on students' L2 motivation, especially on their integrativeness. At the same time, L2 learners' motivation can have a major influence on their experience overseas.

3.2. Attitudes

3.2.1. Attitudes in SLA

Gardner (1985:9) defined the concept of attitude as “an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent”. It has been widely claimed that attitudes have cognitive, affective and conative components: they contain the individual's belief structure, they involve emotional reactions toward a referent and they prompt individuals to behave in a certain way towards said referent. In SLA, two types of attitudes can be distinguished: attitudes towards the L2 speakers and attitudes towards L2 learning. The latter, which refers to teaching materials, method or the teachers' behaviour among others, have been found to have a more significant impact on the successful acquisition of the L2 (Gardner, 1985): individuals with positive attitudes tend to show a greater interest towards the learning situation and as a result, they benefit the most from it, thus leading to higher rates of achievement. It is worth mentioning, however, that although positive attitudes are associated to achievement in foreign language courses, this is not necessarily the case in other subject areas; in other words, attitudes seem to play a more significant role in language learning than in the study of other subjects (Garrett et al., 2003).

Positive attitudes toward the target community, on the other hand, do not necessarily prompt L2 proficiency, since an individual could hold positive attitudes towards L2 native speakers but choose not to study their language due to reasons related to the learning situation, such as a dislike for the language teaching method. Nevertheless, the importance of this type of attitude should not be underestimated, for it can have a major influence on students' efforts to learn the language and become successful L2 speakers (Gardner, 1985).

Attitudes and motivation are closely connected since they imply an active stance

on the search for opportunities to learn and communicate in the L2 and, as a result, both of them have a major impact on individuals' language learning process. Furthermore, as it has been previously mentioned, positive attitudes are essential in the portrayal of a motivated individual, which implies that motivation has an attitudinal component (Gardner, 1985). Therefore, as a constituent of motivation, attitudes are not static and are subject to variation influenced by numerous factors such as SA. In the following section I will provide the results of various studies with regards to the impact of overseas experiences on students' attitudinal changes.

3.2.2. Attitudes and SA

Some scholars (Coleman, 1997; Willis et al. 1977) claim that SA does not seem to yield favorable attitudinal changes toward the target community, since after SA students tended to consider native speakers more negatively than before their departure. The results of other studies, however, hold that SA plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of positive attitudes. Yashima et al. (2004) investigated 60 Japanese students who took part in a mobility programme in the U.S. in order to research the influence of attitudes on WTC. The results stated that learners with positive attitudes toward the target community displayed a higher score in WTC and were more prone to interact with native speakers, thus increasing the possibility of success in the L2. Simultaneously, high contact with L2 native speakers resulted in positive changes in students' attitudes (Clement et al., 1977), which implies that language attitudes and WTC are correlated, for they mutually influence each other. Furthermore, the findings of a study carried out by Ueki and Takeuchi (2015) with 151 Japanese university students in an English-speaking country, suggested that not only were attitudes towards L2 learning strengthened after an overseas stay, but they also exercised a greater influence on students' motivated learning behaviour as a result of SA. Lopez and Gonzales (2017) surveyed 640 Filipino college students in order to examine the relation between L2 learning motivation and L2 learning attitudes. Results of this study indicated that motivation influences positively students' attitudes towards the L2 learning. This finding goes in line with Gardner (1985), who highlights the role of attitudes on individuals' language learning motivation and its maintenance.

A study carried out by Isabelli-García (2006) about U.S. students in Argentina exhibited the impact of attitudes toward the host culture on language learning motivation.

In spite of their initial positive attitudes, two of the students' diaries manifested increasing negative thoughts and opinions as SA drew on due to their experiences overseas. One of the students reported feeling isolated and unable to integrate in the target community due to cultural differences, which led her to find comfort in the familiarity of her American friends and her L1. The other student, on the other hand, developed an unfavourable perspective of Argentinian men, who according to him, were corrupt and offensive towards women. Both learners' negative attitudes toward the L2 community decreased their motivation to learn Spanish and hindered the creation of social networks with native speakers.

The studies mentioned above suggest that SA is likely to have a positive impact on learners' attitudes towards the L2. Nevertheless, attitudes towards the host community show a greater variation since they depend on the amount and nature of students' encounters with the target group.

3.3. Anxiety

3.3.1. Anxiety in SLA

LA is both a largely common and complex emotion, defined by Gregersen and MacIntyre (2014:3) as “the worry and negative emotional reaction when learning and using a second language and is especially relevant in a classroom where self-expression takes place”. This description includes both learners and teachers, whose actions and thoughts within the classroom are frequently affected by LA. Indeed, using a language we are not proficient in poses considerable linguistic challenges to the users of the target language that makes them feel worried or nervous about possible failures when trying to communicate. It is widely believed that the more advanced learners are the ones less likely to experience high levels of LA, since their L2 proficiency level minimises the chances of possible misunderstandings. However, LA has been found to increase amongst advanced learners, due to their perception of being in a more demanding situation that leads them to doubt about their competence in the L2 (Gkonou et al., 2017).

LA primarily exerts a debilitating role in the learning process of the target language, since rather than promoting L2 success it has been found to frequently hinder it. Furthermore, LA tends to diminish learners' positive attitudes toward the L2 and their community, as well as to inhibit their WTC in said language; and it can ultimately lead

students to give up the study of the L2. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that LA is subject to a dynamic and complex relationship with a variety of factors that make it both the consequence and the cause of language performance: that is, anxiety may be the outcome of language aptitude and, at the same time, its arousal may also affect learners' performance (Gkonou et al., 2017). Lastly, these authors define LA as both internal and framed within an external dimension, since it is equally influenced by mental and physiological processes, as well as by the set of circumstances of the social context.

Horwitz (2017) considers the concept of *authentic self-presentation* to be the source of LA, as according to her, language learners frequently find a barrier between communication in L2 and an authentic presentation of their identity in said language. This generates feelings of frustration and discomfort that lead to anxiety towards the usage of the target language. Moreover, self-esteem and perfectionism have been found to correlate with LA: high-anxious students tend to view themselves more negatively and to overanalyse their performance in the L2, which is thoroughly examined in the search for mistakes or, what they consider, personal failures. In comparison to their low-anxious peers, students with high levels of LA regard native speakers as being superior to them and, as a result, they feel inhibited when interacting with them due to the fear of being judged for not having such level of proficiency. In order to avoid these negative emotions and discomfort, anxious students frequently engage in a number of safety behaviours which involve diminishing verbal interaction or avoiding class participation altogether (Gkonou et al., 2017).

Although students, especially those with high levels of LA, tend to hold feelings of uncertainty towards SA, the following section will exhibit the positive impact overseas experiences usually have on L2 learners' anxiety.

3.3.2. Anxiety and SA

SA can generate feelings of uneasiness and embarrassment due to the challenges that being in an unfamiliar environment poses. Nevertheless, students overseas tend to overcome these negative emotions and experience lower levels of LA once they have adjusted to the new situation (Pérez-Vidal, 2014).

Allen and Herron's study (2003) detected a decrease in French students' levels of anxiety after a summer abroad, which implies that even short-term mobility programmes can have a positive impact on learners' LA. In line with the anxiety outcomes found in

Allen and Herron's research, results of Ueki and Takeuchi's (2015) study, mentioned in section 3.2.2., indicated that students' feelings of anxiety were significantly decreased after SA. A more recent analysis of the same participants allowed for a more detailed examination of the students' affective changes after their experience overseas. Findings indicated that prior to SA, participants' anxiety was noticeably influenced by their ought-to L2 self; that is, "the attributes that one believes one *ought to* possess" (Dörnyei et al., 2006:17) in order to avoid criticism, failure or other negative outcomes. Nevertheless, as a result of SA, the gap between students' ideal L2 self and their ought-to L2 self was narrowed, which turned the latter into a powerful motivator rather than a source of anxiety.

Trenchs-Parera and Juan-Garau (2014) examined the effects of SA on a group of Spanish university students after their stay in an English-speaking country. Results of the questionnaire indicated that the levels of anxiety towards speaking English had greatly decreased. Moreover, learners rated themselves as more calm and confident when interacting with native speakers, who are probably the individuals who L2 learners view as the most challenging to communicate with. LA and linguistic self-confidence were found to be closely correlated: when the first one decreased, the latter increased, suggesting that when language learners view themselves as capable communicators in the L2, feelings of frustration or uneasiness tend to soften. Students' WTC also increased as a result of SA: not only were they more willing to use the L2 with the target community or individuals from different countries, but they were also more willing to take part in English classes after SA. Students seemed to be more confident to communicate in the L2 in public and they also appeared to realise about the importance of having an active stance in language classes in order to increase the chances of L2 success.

Lastly, as it has been previously mentioned, LA cannot be isolated from the learner's social context. Lim's (2009) investigation of LA on participants from 32 different countries showed that anxiety tends to be greatly influenced by cultural values. Asian learners were found to have the highest anxiety scores compared to students from other countries: unlike individualistic cultures such as North America, East Asian countries share collectivistic values that encourage the self to adjust to the demands and expectations of others (Apple et al., 2017). As a result, the ought-to self tends to exert a greater influence on Asian students, which, in turn, leads to higher levels of LA.

The investigations mentioned above suggest that SA has a positive impact on LA, which is normally decreased as a result of successfully facing everyday situations in the L2. The increase in students' self-confidence boosts their WTC; that is, the perception of being more competent L2 speakers encourages them to be more willing to use the target language.

4. The Study

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of university students' SA on their motivation, attitudes and anxiety towards English. On the basis of said objective, four main research questions are posed in the current study:

1. Is there a change in students' motivation towards English as a result of SA?
2. Does SA result in more positive attitudes towards English and its native speakers?
3. Does SA decrease students' levels of LA?
4. Does students' perception of their English proficiency level improve after SA?

4.1. Participants

The participants of the current study were a group of 25 last year Spanish university students of International Relations in the University of Deusto following a compulsory year abroad during their third academic year. Students were mainly women (20 females and 5 males) and were aged between 21 and 24. The mobility programme offered a wide variety of locations to study, not exclusively English speaking countries, and therefore, 14 students spent their SA in non-English-speaking countries. However, their degree, both at home and overseas, is taught in English. At the time of the data collection the participants had been learning the foreign language for 16 years and therefore held an advanced level of English.

4.2. Instrument

In order to investigate the affective outcomes of the students' SA I used a modified version of the standardised Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed by Gardner (1985). The AMTB was slightly altered for a better adjustment to the group that was being analysed. For research purposes, participants were asked to specify the SA country and the amount of English they spoke on a scale from 0% to 100%. Nevertheless, their identity was kept anonymous.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 16 statements that measured students' attitudes, anxiety and motivation towards English after their SA (see Appendix 1). The items required participants' agreement or disagreement with said statements on a 5-point scale (from 1 – disagree – to 5 – agree –). The second part of the questionnaire was comprised of four open questions regarding students' perception of their affective and linguistic outcomes after their SA. The answers to these questions were written in English.

4.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was piloted on four students before using it to collect data, after which no changes were deemed necessary. The participants were then provided with the questionnaires, which were completed outside of class and directly delivered to the researcher. On average, it took 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

5. Results

Participants rated 16 statements using a 5-point scale in order to show their agreement or disagreement with items referring to integrative motivation (Q2, Q7, Q15), instrumental motivation (Q4, Q10, Q13), positive attitudes (Q5, Q12, Q16) and negative attitudes (Q6, Q9) towards English, and LA (Q1, Q3, Q8, Q11, Q14). Statements addressing integrative motivation received high scores: most of the participants acknowledged that SA made them regard English as a more valuable tool to interact with a higher number of individuals (76%) and to participate more freely in intercultural activities (80%). Furthermore, 68% of the answers stated that after SA, students enjoyed more meeting and communicating with English speakers.

The questionnaire also showed an increase in learners' instrumental motivation: SA made them realise of the importance of English as a requirement for their future career (68%) or as an asset to get a good job (92%). Question 13, however, exhibited more varied answers: 48% of the students believed that the knowledge of English would make them be more respected by society; 24%, on the other hand, disagreed with this statement and 28% of the answers remained neutral.

Regarding positive attitudes towards English, 76% of the participants agreed that SA increased the desire of speaking said language perfectly and the same number of students declared that they planned to learn as much English as possible after SA. 56%

of the answers agreed with the statement “I love learning English as a result of my stay abroad”, while 28% of the students did not agree nor disagree with said question. All of the participants (100%) disagreed with the two items referring to negative attitudes towards English: “When I finish university I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it” and “I hate English as a result of my stay abroad”.

Questions addressing LA received diverse answers: almost half of the participants (48%) denied being embarrassed to participate in their classes in English after SA. However, nearly a quarter of them (24%) agreed with said statement, and 28% of the answers remained neutral. 52% of the students recognised that before SA they were afraid of being ridiculed by their peers when speaking in English; nevertheless, 40% of the answers showed disagreement with this statement. Linked to the previous question, 14 students (56%) did no longer feel that their classmates spoke better English than them, while 28% of the answers agreed with said statement. The last two questions exhibited high agreement and disagreement scores: 48% of the participants denied still experiencing nervousness or confusion when speaking in English, however, 32% of the answers rated this item with either 4 or 5. Similarly, question 11 “Even after my stay abroad, I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our classes in English” exhibited disagreement by nearly half of the participants (48%) and agreement by more than a quarter of them (28%).

Concerning the open questions, the first one referred to students’ confidence when speaking in English after SA. Participants claimed to feel less worried about speaking in the L2 and making mistakes after SA. Indeed, emotions such as embarrassment, nervousness or fear towards the L2 were softened as a result of having to use the language on a daily basis. According to the students surveyed in this study, SA urged them to get out of their comfort zone in order to be able to face the different challenges that life overseas poses. The answer of one of the participants illustrates this feeling, which according to her, led to an increase in her confidence:

Living in an environment that required me to communicate in English in order to have positive relationships and achieve different goals (...) sort of forced me to practice every day, hence making me more used to communicating in that language until I became more fluent and therefore confident (Student 23).

In some cases, however, confidence seemed to be context-dependent: one of the participants admitted feeling more self-assured when she returned to Spain and talked in English “to people from here”. Nevertheless, she declared still not feeling confident enough when interacting with English native speakers. Indeed, the latter seem to concern some participants since they believe they are more likely to be judged for not having a high level of proficiency. Nonetheless, numerous students indicated that they regard native speakers as less threatening as a result of SA; one of the learners said that her sojourn made her see English native speakers “much more similar to us, (...) as vulnerable as we are” (Student 3).

It is worth mentioning that although the majority of the participants reported feeling more confident when using the L2, one of them explained that in spite of having improved his English during the stay overseas, he had not experienced an increase in his confidence “due to my [his] personality” (Student 17). Four participants admitted not having interacted much in English during SA, which led them to not perceive improvements in the L2 and thus resulting in a lack of increase in their confidence.

The second question made reference to students’ willingness to use English after SA. Except for one student that recognised not being eager to use the L2 unless asked to do so, the rest of his peers declared that their WTC either increased or remained unchanged since they were already very willing to use the L2. Several participants attributed this boost in WTC to their increased self-confidence after their sojourn. One of the students even claimed that SA motivated her to engage in other activities that involved English, such as reading, which she continues to do whenever she is able to.

The question regarding participants’ attitudes towards English and English native speakers after SA received rather diverse answers. 36% of the students indicated that they already held positive attitudes towards the language and its community before the sojourn and that these attitudes remained unchanged after SA. A few of them attributed the lack of change to the few interactions they had either in the L2 or with L2 native speakers. Several participants, on the other hand, declared that their SA made them get rid of some stereotypes about native speakers and hold a more positive stance towards them: students valued native speakers’ respectful and helpful attitude towards L2 learners. However, four participants compared themselves and other English learners with native speakers, highlighting the latter’s little effort to learn other languages. One of them reported that

during SA she realised that some English native speakers “tend to ridicule non-native speakers because of their accent or pronunciation, rather than appreciating the effort we are making” (Student 23), which can make them feel discouraged. Attitudes towards English, on the other hand, seemed to become more positive: students declared considering English more important and useful since SA allowed them to apply the knowledge acquired in FI in real life situations. Furthermore, several answers emphasised that as a result of SA, they began to enjoy using English: “before I went to England I used to avoid speaking in English as it made me feel very anxious but after it I have gained a lot of confidence and I enjoy using the language” (Student 24). It is also interesting to mention that participants reported valuing this language more, since it allowed them to feel integrated while abroad, not necessarily with native speakers, but with an English speaking international community.

Lastly, the fourth open question referred to students’ perceptions of linguistic gains after their SA. Except for those that had few interactions in English during their sojourn (16%), the rest of the participants acknowledged that they had improved either their overall level of English or certain aspects of it. One of the participants declared having improved his overall linguistic skills and stated that “the exchange year is one of the best opportunities to improve languages, and I strongly recommend the experience” (Student 17). Fluency was the most repeated term among the answers to this question: one of the participants defined it as “the capacity of answering quickly without having to think how to say things for a long time” (Student 2). Listening ability was also reported to improve as a result of being exposed to different accents and expressions, which, at the same time, provided SA students with a wider range of vocabulary. Although to a lesser extent (16%), pronunciation also seemed to improve, which, according to one of the participants, had a big impact on increasing her confidence.

6. Discussion: Affective outcomes after SA

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between SA and its effects on English language learners’ motivation, attitudes and anxiety. The first research question aimed to examine whether participants experienced motivational changes after SA. These students were already highly motivated to study English since their degree requires advanced knowledge of this language together with interest towards international affairs and communication; nevertheless, results indicated that both participants’

integrative and instrumental motivation increased, which confirms its dynamic nature, as previously mentioned (Dörnyei, 2009). Unlike the investigation carried out by Allen and Herron (2003) that did not find an increase in integrativeness, probably as a result of participants' lack of interaction with the host community, most of the students of the current research, even those that stayed in non-English speaking countries, reported using English on a daily basis and exhibited significant increase in integrative motivation. Not only did they realise of the importance of studying English as a means of intercultural communication, but they were also more willing to use the language more often to meet and interact with other speakers. These results are consistent with Dufon and Churchill (2006), who found a positive connection between integrative motivation and direct contact with the L2 community, which, due to the globalisation of English, does not necessarily refer to native speakers but rather to an international group of individuals. Such contact, in turn, reinforces the notion of English as an essential tool to understand the current global world (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Furthermore, after their sojourn, students associated speaking in English, frequently considered a source of anxiety, with positive emotions such as enjoyment.

Students' instrumental motivation also increased: utilitarian purposes such as enhancing their future career encouraged participants to continue studying and improving their English. Although one of them reported not having used English often while abroad, it was during her sojourn when she realised that she had to improve her level and began to take private English lessons when she returned home. Therefore, it could be said that despite lack of interaction, SA can motivate learners to further their L2 studies in order to become proficient speakers. Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System includes both promotion instrumentality and integrativeness in the formation of the ideal L2 self, which functions as a powerful motivator to learn the L2. This implies that participants' increase in both orientations strengthens the image of themselves as competent speakers of English and prompts them to fulfill their goals.

Most students' WTC either increased or remained unchanged due to preexisting high levels of willingness prior to SA. The boost in WTC was attributed to participants' increased self-confidence, which confirms that low levels of LA can be beneficial to WTC, while high anxious students tend to be less willing to interact in the L2 (Gkonou et al., 2017). Furthermore, in line with Clément et al. (1977), the current study found a correlation between participants' WTC and their attitudes towards the L2 and their

speakers: those students that frequently communicated in English while abroad exhibited positive changes in their attitudes and vice versa, which demonstrates that WTC and attitudes are mutually influential.

The second research question inquired whether SA resulted in more positive attitudes towards English and English native speakers. Although participants already held positive attitudes towards said language, they acknowledged that as a result of SA they regarded English as a means of communication rather than as an academic subject or task. The use of English in informal settings led to the appearance of positive feelings such as enjoyment when speaking it, which is key to further the study of a foreign language. Indeed, a stronger relation has been found between enjoyment and competent language performance outside the classroom than within FI contexts, since successfully facing everyday situations in the L2 acts as a strong motivator (Ross and Rivers, 2018). Furthermore, participants' high level of motivation confirms that it positively influences their attitudes towards L2 learning (Lopez and Gonzalez, 2017).

Not all students encountered English native speakers during SA; however, those that did, reported developing more positive attitudes towards them as a result of those meetings. SA led to the reduction of negative stereotypes about native speakers, which is beneficial for language learning (Trenchs-Parera and Juan-Garau, 2014). Nevertheless, according to Coleman's study (1997), SA students tend to hold more negative attitudes towards the target community after SA. Although the positive attitudes most of the participants declared having towards English native speakers seem to challenge Coleman's findings, it should be mentioned that some students of the current research did develop negative attitudes. The encounters of four participants with the target community resulted in the development of an unfavourable image of English individuals, who, according to these SA students, often ridiculed L2 speakers instead of appreciating their effort to communicate in a foreign language. In this case, these participants developed positive attitudes towards the international community of English speakers, who they felt identified with, rather than towards English native speakers: "I think English non-native speakers tend to be more open-minded towards this subject [learning new languages]" (Student 10).

The third research question aimed to examine whether LA decreased as a result of SA. Results of the study indicated that although there was a general decrease in

participants' LA, several answers to the questionnaire reflected that even after their SA, some students still felt uneasy when speaking in English in formal contexts, which poses the threat of being judged by teachers or classmates. As Trenchs-Parera and Juan-Garau (2014) point out, on some occasions the benefits of SA cannot completely counteract students' levels of LA experienced at home before their sojourn. Moreover, one of the participants of the current study attributed his unchanged LA to his personality, which seems to imply that he experiences trait anxiety rather than state anxiety (Gkonou et al., 2017); that is, his anxiety is not context-specific but a characteristic or a trait of his personality, which may explain the little impact SA had on his LA.

It is also worth mentioning that the number of participants (72%) that acknowledged feeling more confident after SA seems to be higher than the number of students who reported experiencing low levels of anxiety in the closed questions. This may be due to the fact that the latter referred to classroom anxiety, while students' answers to the open questions focused on the feelings they experienced when communicating in English in informal settings. It could be inferred, therefore, that after SA, participants were more confident of their L2 linguistic skills outside the classroom but still felt unsure in the FI context, where L2 performance is more likely to be examined.

Decrease in perfectionism and increase in fluency were the main reasons mentioned by the participants to explain their gains in confidence and decrease of LA. Gkonou et al. (2017) stated that focusing on fluency rather than accuracy tends to have positive effects on students' LA, which is reflected in the current study: during SA, participants began to worry less about mistakes and placed a greater importance on expressing themselves more easily. This helped them develop a more positive image of themselves as competent L2 speakers, and thus, overcome the uneasiness that interacting with native speakers frequently generates. Furthermore, as stated by one of the participants, gains on fluency led to a more accurate expression of their thoughts. Horwitz (2017) declared that the failure to present themselves authentically is often a source of LA; however, authentic self-presentation seems to be more attainable for SA students as a result of increased fluency and, consequently, they are more likely to experience a decrease in LA.

The last research question aimed to investigate whether SA had an impact on participants' perception of their L2 competence. Students that had few interactions in

English while abroad did not experience an increase in their perceived L2 competence. Nevertheless, most students declared being more fluent after their year abroad; as a result of communicating in English on a daily basis they became more familiar with the language and, therefore, its use began to entail a lesser effort. This confirms previous findings that claim SA and informal instruction to have positive effects on L2 fluency (Dufon and Churchill, 2006) as well as on listening skills (Allen, 2002; Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Indeed, several participants reported that as a result of SA they were more able to understand their interlocutors and their accents. Students also acknowledged that they had become more familiar with new words and expressions, which goes in line with Pérez-Vidal's (2014) findings of the positive effects of SA on L2 vocabulary. Pronunciation gains, on the other hand, seemed to occur to a lesser extent in accordance with previous studies that affirm that overseas experiences do not seem to enhance this language skill (Pérez-Vidal, 2014).

The linguistic and extralinguistic gains experienced by the participants of this study confirm that SA exposes learners to a variety of situations and interactions with native or international English speakers that lead learners to develop both their socio-pragmatic awareness as well as their overall linguistic skills.

7. Conclusion

The present study investigated the effect of SA on 25 university English L2 speakers' motivation, attitudes and anxiety. Results of the study offer empirical evidence that even stays in non-English speaking countries can have beneficial affective outcomes. The findings revealed that mobility programmes contribute to the development of positive attitudes towards the language, the increase in instrumental and integrative motivation, and the decrease in LA, especially in informal settings. Furthermore, participants' positive perception of linguistic gains –notably on fluency– demonstrated that their self-confidence was enhanced as a result of SA, which in turn, made them see themselves as more competent speakers. However, attitude change towards native speakers remains inconclusive, for participants' answers displayed great variation depending on the amount and nature of their encounters with the target group. Therefore, some of them reported a positive change in their stance towards native speakers, others declared that their attitudes remained unchanged and, although to a lesser extent, some students developed a negative image of English native speakers.

The lack of positive outcomes on participants that did not interact in the L2 while abroad suggests that SA and student effort to use the L2 are mutually influential; that is, language learners will experience the benefits of informal contact provided that they strive to create social networks to communicate in the L2. Therefore, encouraging students to interact in the target language during SA, either with native or international speakers, is key to promote effective language learning, and should become a main objective of university exchange programmes.

In the future, it would be interesting to survey SA students before and after their sojourn as well as to carry out a thorough examination of students' context while abroad, since it may provide more data for the analysis of the diverse attitudinal outcomes. More research is also needed in order to shed some light on the different individual and sociocultural factors that affect SA in order to maximise the benefits of the sojourn experience. Furthermore, a larger sample could allow for generalisations of the impact of SA on students' motivation, attitudes and anxiety.

Despite the limitations, this study demonstrates that, when learners strive to become competent L2 speakers and to be part of an international community, SA provides an optimal context for the development of both linguistic and extralinguistic skills that ultimately lead to L2 proficiency.

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Appendix 1: AMTB Survey

Gender:

Study Abroad country:

Check the box that best matches your agreement with the following statements:

| | 1 Disagree | 2 Slightly disagree | 3 Neutral | 4 Slightly Agree | 5 Agree |
|---|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------|
| 1. After my stay abroad it still embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our classes in English. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | |
| 2. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English is important because it will enable me to meet and converse with more and varied people. | | | | | |
| 3. Before studying abroad, I used to be more afraid that the other students would laugh at me when I spoke English. | | | | | |
| 4. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English can be important to me because I will need it for my future career. | | | | | |
| 5. Studying abroad increased the desire of speaking English perfectly. I wish I could speak English perfectly. | | | | | |
| 6. When I finish university, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it. | | | | | |
| 7. I enjoy more meeting and listening to people who speak English after having studied abroad. | | | | | |
| 8. I still get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my classes in English despite having been abroad. | | | | | |
| 9. I hate English as a result of my stay abroad. | | | | | |
| 10. Studying English can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job. | | | | | |
| 11. Even after my stay abroad, I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our classes in English. | | | | | |
| 12. After my stay abroad, I plan to learn as much English as possible. | | | | | |
| 13. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have a knowledge of a foreign language. | | | | | |
| 14. Even after studying abroad, I still feel that the | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| other students speak English better than I do. | | | | | |
| 15. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups. | | | | | |
| 16. I love learning English as a result of my stay abroad. | | | | | |

How much English did you speak while you were abroad? (circle one of the options)

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% 76-100%

After the period abroad, do you feel more... (answer each question explaining your thoughts):

- Confident to speak in English?

- More willing to use English?

-Has your attitude towards English and/or English native speakers changed after your stay abroad? Why?

-Would you say your level of English has improved after your stay abroad?

Appendix 2: Results of the AMTB Survey

| | 1-2 | 3 | 4-5 |
|--|-----------------------|---------|---------|
| Q1. After my stay abroad it still embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our classes in English. | 12 ¹ (48%) | 7 (28%) | 6 (24%) |

¹ Number of answers out of 25.

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---------|----------|
| Q2. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English is important because it will enable me to meet and converse with more and varied people. | 2 (8%) | 4 (16%) | 19 (76%) |
| Q3. Before studying abroad, I used to be more afraid that the other students would laugh at me when I spoke English. | 10 (40%) | 2 (8%) | 13 (52%) |
| Q4. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English can be important to me because I will need it for my future career. | 1 (4%) | 7 (28%) | 17 (68%) |
| Q5. Studying abroad increased the desire of speaking English perfectly. I wish I could speak English perfectly. | 2 (8%) | 4 (16%) | 19 (76%) |
| Q6. When I finish university, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it. | 25 (100%) | 0 | 0 |
| Q7. I enjoy more meeting and listening to people who speak English after having studied abroad. | 3 (12%) | 5 (20%) | 17 (68%) |
| Q8. I still get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my classes in English despite having been abroad. | 12 (48%) | 5 (20%) | 8 (32%) |
| Q9. I hate English as a result of my stay abroad. | 25 (100%) | 0 | 0 |
| Q10. Studying English can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job. | 0 | 2 (8%) | 23 (92%) |
| Q11. Even after my stay abroad, I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our classes in English. | 12 (48%) | 6 (24%) | 7 (28%) |
| Q12. After my stay abroad, I plan to learn as much English as possible. | 1 (4%) | 5 (20%) | 19 (76%) |
| Q13. My stay abroad made me realise that studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have a knowledge of a foreign language. | 6 (24%) | 7 (28%) | 12 (48%) |
| Q14. Even after studying abroad, I still feel that the other students speak English better than I do. | 14 (56%) | 4 (16%) | 7 (28%) |
| Q15. My stay abroad made me realise that | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---------|---------|----------|
| studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups. | 0 | 5 (20%) | 17 (68%) |
| Q16. I love learning English as a result of my stay abroad. | 4 (16%) | 7 (28%) | 14 (56%) |